



**U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement**

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# News Release

## **Mexican architect convicted on drug charges related to sophisticated cross border tunnel**

TUCSON, Ariz. – A Mexican architect who oversaw construction of a highly sophisticated tunnel beneath the Arizona-Mexico border faces a minimum 10-year prison sentence after being convicted on drug smuggling charges stemming from an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Felipe de Jesus Corona-Verbera, 52, of Guadalajara, Mexico, was convicted by a federal jury late yesterday. Corona-Verbera oversaw construction of a drug tunnel that extended from a residence in Agua Prieta, Mexico to a warehouse in Douglas, Arizona. The tunnel was discovered in May 1990 after 2,037 pounds of cocaine, seized in the Phoenix area, was found to have been smuggled through the tunnel.

Corona-Verbera had been a fugitive since 1990. He was arrested in 2003 and extradited by Mexico to the United States. Corona-Verbera's sentencing is set for June 12.

"This guilty verdict is the result of many years of hard work by prosecutors in the U.S. Attorney's Office working in conjunction with ICE and our counterparts in Mexico," stated Paul K. Charlton, U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona. "Dedicated professionals from these and other agencies work tirelessly to get drugs, and those who smuggle them, off our streets and out of our communities."

During the course of the Arizona investigation, law enforcement officials seized several tons of cocaine, thousands of pounds of marijuana, and millions of dollars in U.S. currency from one of the largest drug cartels in Mexico, headed by Joaquin Guzman, AKA "El Chappo."

Corona-Verbera was the architect for the Guzman Drug Trafficking Organization. He was linked to other structures he built for Guzman, including residences in Mexico with hidden rooms that were used to hide currency, drugs, and weapons. Entry into those rooms was through the floor or other hidden entrances, often through the use of hydraulics.

To gain entrance to the tunnel in Mexico, an outside water spigot was turned on, which resulted in a section of concrete floor inside the house under a pool table, rising approximately eight feet into the

air through the use of hydraulic pumps. The tunnel shaft was approximately 35 feet deep while the tunnel itself extended 200 feet into the U.S. and came up through a false drain inside a warehouse in Douglas, Arizona.

Guzman is under indictment for narcotic violations in Tucson, Arizona and elsewhere. He escaped from a Mexican prison in 2001 and is alleged to have paid a multi-million dollar bribe to prison officials in order to gain his freedom.

Guzman's organization has a history of violence. One of the government witnesses during the Corona-Verbera trial was a high-ranking member of the Guzman organization. On three occasions Guzman attempted to silence the witness while he was in a Mexican prison awaiting extradition to the United States. During the first two attempts, the witness was stabbed multiple times. On the third attempt, two hand grenades were thrown near the witness' prison cell.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*